Grammatical Relations in Ktunaxa (Kutenai)

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T his paper has two purposes. On the one hand, it has the goal of describing grammatical relations in Ktunaxa or Kutenai,[1] a language isolate spoken in southeast British Columbia in Canada and in adjacent areas in Idaho and Montana in the United States. On the other hand, it has the theoretical and methodological goal of illustrating an approach to grammatical relations in a particular language that is offered as an alternative to the general approach that typifies much work, be it descriptive, theoretical or functional, during the past twenty years. Much work assumes universal grammatical relations of some sort, whether they be like subjects in some formal sense (as represented by work in Relational Grammar), subjects in some less formal sense (as represented in a lot of more functionally oriented work), or some similar formal notion like *external argument*. A common approach to grammatical relations in particular languages is to "look for" instantiations of the universal relations, using some explicit or implicit criteria. If the language has grammatical relations that are relatively isomorphic to grammatical relations in European languages, then the situation is unproblematic. If, on the other hand, there is something in the language that resembles grammatical relations in European languages in some respects but not in others, controversies arise as to what the proper analysis is of the language. Examples of languages of this sort include ergative languages (especially syntactically ergative languages like Dyirbal; cf. Dixon 1972), Philippine languages (e.g., Schachter 1976, 1977), and Algonquian languages (cf. Rhodes 1976, Dahlstrom 1991). The situation in Kutenai strongly resembles the situation in Algonquian languages (cf. Dryer 1992), and much of the controversy surrounding Algonquian languages is directly applicable to Kutenai. For that reason, the discussion of Kutenai in this paper is intended to apply, at least indirectly, to the controversy in Algonquian languages, and much of it not all of the arguments discussed here appear to carry over to at least Ojibwa and Cree (though the extent to which they do is probably itself something that is subject to debate).

One of the primary methodological assumptions of this paper is that grammatical relations are primarily language-specific. There are many striking similarities among grammatical relations in different languages,

similarities that have led many linguists to posit grammatical relations that are claimed to be universal, either in the sense that all languages have them, or in the sense that they are part of the universal vocabulary for describing languages, even though not all languages may have them. A widely-held view is that these putatively universal grammatical relations are real concepts, and not just convenient labels, that they are as real if not more real than the manifestations of them in particular languages. The viewpoint of this paper is that such putatively universal grammatical relations do not actually exist, but are simply convenient labels, though when linguists examine languages whose grammatical relations do not quite fit the universal concepts, they take on more the status of inconvenient labels, since they lead to lengthy and usually never-resolved controversies that on the view of this paper are largely vacuous terminological arguments.

On the view of this paper, it is the grammatical relations in particular languages that are real, more real than the abstract putatively universal relations that are often assumed. Unfortunately, the dominant view is so pervasive that it may not be initially clear what I mean by "grammatical relations in particular languages." Some linguists use the term *grammatical relations* in a narrow sense as a label for a particular set of relations like subject and object. For example, Van Valin (1993:50-56) argues against the universality of grammatical relations, but what he is arguing against is the universality of a very specific set of grammatical relations. His theory posits instead a pair of macro-rôles, actor and undergoer, which are fairly directly linked to semantic rôles. In the sense of this paper, actor and undergoer are grammatical relations, at least in languages where they play a rôle. While my specific discussion of Kutenai will hopefully make clearer the broad sense I intend by *grammatical relations*, a loose first approximation would be any grouping of relationships between clausal elements and a clause that plays a rôle in the grammar of a particular language. This approximation suffers from restricting the notion of grammatical relations to the clause level, something that I believe is ultimately wrong; however, my discussion in this paper will be restricted to clause-level grammatical relations and a more general characterization would only obscure what I am trying to say.

A further fundamental assumption of this paper, though one that is really an elaboration of the preceding one, is that the question of what is really grammatical relations are in a language and the question of what to call them are two separate questions, the first of which is important and the second of which is not. These two questions are frequently not distinguished, and linguists often treat the issue of what to call the grammatical relations in a language as a substantive part of identifying what the grammatical relations are. On the assumptions of this paper, this confusion arises from the view that grammatical relations are universal concepts and identifying the grammatical relations in a language on this view involves identifying what in the language is an instantiation of these relations.

The approach to grammatical relations in this paper bears some resemblance to the approach to word classes reflected in much descriptive work from the structuralist era, illustrated in fact by the approach to word classes in Kutenai by Garvin (1948). Using only morphological criteria, Garvin identified three word classes (more accurately theme classes), which he called X, Y and W. When one examines the meanings of words belonging to X, Y and W, one quickly realizes that the items in the word class Garvin calls X bear a striking resemblance to word classes in other languages that have been called *verbs*, that the items in the word class Garvin calls Y bear a striking resemblance to word classes in other languages that have been called *nouns*, and that the word class W contains a variety of words that correspond to words in other languages that are called something other than verbs or nouns. In fact, one is tempted to go even further and say that the words in what Garvin calls class X are "really" verbs, and so on. But while I agree that the word *verb* is a convenient label for what Garvin calls class X, I think that it is a mistake to say that the words in class X are really verbs. Rather, they are, really, just class X. What defines the words in this class is a set of morphological criteria. Namely, there is a set of affixes in Kutenai that can occur with words in class X, and this property is shared by the words in class X, but not by the words in classes Y and W. The criteria are specific to Kutenai, though once again they may resemble criteria for word classes in other languages. Whether something belongs to

class X in Kutenai is determined solely by its properties in that language. Word class X in Kutenai is real: it is a set of words in Kutenai that conform to a set of specific morphological criteria.

But, one may object, surely we want to explain the striking similarity between class X in Kutenai and classes that have been called verbs in other languages. Surely (the argument goes), this similarity is not a coincidence; calling it class X implies it is a coincidence; calling the words in this class *verbs* captures this similarity. In response to this, I would agree that the similarity is not a coincidence, but would deny that calling the words in this class *verbs* captures this similarity, if by "capturing the similarity" one means "explaining the similarity." I assume that the similarities among word classes in different languages reflect the effect of functional, semantic and cognitive motivations, which then explain the similarities. While there may be some room for debate as to what these functional motivations are, there is no lack of hypotheses and little question (in my mind) that these similarities do have functional, semantic and cognitive explanations. So, while I recognize the existence of word class X in Kutenai, and the existence of the similarities between class X in Kutenai and word classes in other languages that have been called verbs, and the existence of functional motivations for these similarities, I do not see any reason to posit, in addition to these things, a universal class of verbs, or a universal concept of *verb*. It may be convenient to call the words in class X in Kutenai *verbs* (and I admit that that is what I normally call them), but that is not the same as claiming that the theoretical concept *verb*, of which a class of words in Kutenai is an instantiation, has some rôle to play in linguistic theory. In the case of word classes that are called *verbs*, the similarities across languages are so striking that, apart from controversies about whether there is a verb-noun distinction in some languages, calling the class of words in each language *verbs* is harmless. If someone were to argue for some language that it lacked a class of verbs because the meanings in question were all expressed by adjectives, I would hope that many would suspect that the issue was simply a terminological one.

But similar controversies in the area of grammatical relations are more often viewed as substantive. On my view, they are largely terminological. My approach to grammatical relations in Kutenai will be similar in spirit to Garvin's approach to word classes in Kutenai. Just as Garvin identified three word classes in Kutenai on the basis of language-specific morphological criteria, and labeled them X, Y and W, I will attempt to identify grammatical relations in the language on the basis of language-specific grammatical criteria, and invent labels for them. After doing so, I will turn to the question of what more mnemonic labels we might find more convenient, including terms that have been used in the context of other languages, but my position will be that this exercise is independent of the process of identifying the grammatical relations in Kutenai, and not a substantive one.

THE AGREEMENT DIMENSION IN KUTENAI

The place that I will start my examination of grammatical relations in Kutenai will be the verb morphology. Many of the facts I describe here I have described previously (Dryer 1991, 1992a, 1994). I should note that while my discussion of grammatical relations will attempt to avoid using terminology reminiscent of that used in describing other languages, I will feel free to employ more familiar terminology for other sorts of things in the language, such as *verb*, *first person*, and *arguments of the verb*. Ultimately, I assume that the use of these terms is irrelevant and that one could go through the same exercise I am going through with grammatical relations to justify the categories for which I use these terms on language-internal grounds, and then, after observing the striking similarity between these categories and categories in other languages, feel free to use these terms as labels for the internal categories of the language.

One term that I will employ is that of verbal argument, where I concede that one might need to tell a rather complicated story to justify, on purely language-internal grounds, the notion I am employing this term for. I use the term to refer both to dependents of the verb that are expressed by noun phrases and other sorts of constituents and to semantic elements

corresponding to proclitics and suffixes that occur with the verb and that express person and number. For example, while the first person proclitic *hu* in (1) is written as a separate word, it is not a noun phrase like the English pronoun *I* in the gloss for (1) in that it has completely different distributional properties from noun phrases and belongs to a large set of proclitic morphemes that precede the verb and that belong to a larger unit one might call the verbal phrase.

(1)   hu   ¢xa-ni
     1   talk-INDIC
     'I talked.'

In fact, in treating these morphemes as proclitics, I am assuming the analysis of Morgan (1991). Garvin (1948) treated all of these morphemes as prefixes on the verb rather than proclitics and although there are phonological arguments for treating them as clitics, they function analogously to affixes in other languages. The point, however, is that one has to tell a complicated story to justify a notion of *argument of the verb* that will include both the first person argument in (1) represented by the proclitic *hu*, and the noun phrase *ni? nasu?kin* 'the chief' in (2), since on distributional syntactic grounds they behave completely differently. Although I will not be providing such a justification here, it would be based on the fact that in the interpretation of (1) and (2), both *hu* 'first person' and *ni? nasu?kin* 'the chief' identify who it is that talked.

(2)   ¢xa-ni   ni?   nasu?kin
     talk-indic   the   chief
     The chief talked. (tape NS.21, story 4, line 66)

In clauses containing a single argument of the verb, and one that is first or second person, the arguments are represented by a combination of proclitics and verbal suffixes, as in (1) above and as in (3) for other combinations of person and number, where the proclitics indicate the person and suffixes are used in addition to the proclitics when the argument is plural.

(3)   (a)   hin   ¢xa-ni
          2   talk-INDIC
          'You (sg.) talked.'

     (b)   hu   ¢xa-naɬa?-ni
          1   talk-1pl-INDIC
          'We talked.'

     (c)   hin   ¢xa-kiɬ-ni
          2   talk-2pl-INDIC
          'You (pl.) talked.'

In employing the term *argument* here, my intention is to avoid the term *subject*, since that might presuppose a category in Kutenai with certain properties that have yet to be determined.

When the sole argument in a clause is third person, this argument is represented either by a separate constituent, like the noun phrase *ni? nasu?kin* 'the chief' in (2) above, or by the absence of any morpheme, as in (4).

(4)   ¢xa-ni
     talk-INDIC
     'He/she/they talked.'

There is no overt morpheme in (4) indicating the argument of the verb, but in the absence of any marking, the clause is interpreted in a way that is similar to that of third person pronouns in English, or to clauses in other languages in which the verb morphology is the sole indicator of the subject of the verb, except that in Kutenai it is the absence of the morphemes illustrated in (1) and (3) that indicate that the argument is third person. Because of the absence of any overt morpheme in (4), there are a number of different directions we could go at this point, but I will proceed, without justification, on the assumption that in clauses like (4) a third person argument is indicated by the absence of any other indication of the argument.

With a crucial proviso to be made later, third person arguments of the verb are always indicated either by a separate constituent, analogous to (2),

or by the absence of any marker, as in (4). In clauses with two arguments, one of which is first or second person and the other of which is third person, the first or second person argument is indicated either in the same manner as that illustrated in (1) and (3), or by one of a distinct set of suffixes. The examples in (5) illustrate clauses with two arguments whose form is the same as those in (1) and (3a), but which are interpreted as having another argument which is third person.

(5)
   (a) hu wu-kat-i
       1   see-INDIC
       'I saw him/her/it/them.'

   (b) hin   wu-kat-i
       2   see-INDIC
       'You (sg.) saw him/her/it/them.'

The examples in (6), in contrast, involve verb forms distinct from those illustrated so far.

(6)
   (a) wu-kat-ap-ni
       see-1sg-INDIC
       'He/she/it/they saw me.'

   (b) wu-kat-is-ni
       see-2-INDIC
       'He/she/it/they saw you (sg.).'

   (c) wu-kat-awas-ni
       see-1pl-INDIC
       'He/she/it/they saw us.'

   (d) wu-kat-is-kił-ni
       see-2pl-INDIC
       'He/she/it/they saw you (pl.).'

The first person argument in (6a), for example, is indicated by a suffix -ap rather than by the proclitic hu. One may be tempted at this point to say that

the suffixes in (6) are object suffixes, while the combinations of proclitics and suffixes in the previous examples are subject morphemes. While such a conclusion would be, loosely speaking, correct, once again I want to avoid familiar terms because they can lead to confusion as to what defines the categories in question. I will refer to first or second person arguments represented by the morphemes in (1) and (3) as Agreement-A's and to first and second person arguments represented by the morphemes in (6) as Agreement-B's. The chart in (7) summarizes the proclitics and suffixes associated with each of these two kinds of arguments (ignoring some complications with first and second plural).

(7)

	Agreement-A		Agreement-B
1sg	hu-		-(n)ap
2sg	hin-		-(n)is
1pl	hu-	-(n)ała	-(n)awas
2pl	hin-	-kił	-(n)iskił

Now there is a danger at this point that the remainder of this paper might be so obtuse because of the invented terminology that its point would be lost. For that reason, for the remainder of this paper I will continuously refer to the status that an argument holds in two ways, by its official name, from a set of invented labels, and in parentheses by a more mnemonic nickname that is provided solely so that the reader does not have to learn a new metalanguage in order to follow this paper. Thus, I will say that the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) in (1) above is first person singular, that the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) in (6a) is third person, and that the Agreement-B (agreement-object) in (6a) is first person singular. No significance should be assigned to the fact that I have used the words subject and object in these nicknames.

If we take a further example, that given in (8), we can determine that the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) is third person and that the Agreement-B (agreement-object) is second person singular, simply from the morphemes involved: the second person suffix is a suffix listed in (7) as an Agreement-B (agreement-object) suffix, and since every clause must have an Agreement-A

(agreement-subject), and since there is no overt morpheme associated with Agreement-A's, the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) must be third person.

(8) ¢xaɬ qa ?it'x-nis-ni
future-neg bite-2-indic
'He will not bite you.' (tape 71, second part, line 261)

It is true that underlying the assignment of whether something is an Agreement-A (agreement-subject) or an Agreement-B (agreement-object) are semantic principles very similar to those used for determining what is subject and what is object in English and other languages. Nevertheless it is the particular morphemes of Kutenai which are the defining characteristics of Agreement-A's and Agreement-B's.

While the overt morphemes associated with first and second person Agreement-A's and Agreement B's allow the direct identification of the status of first and second person arguments, the absence of overt verbal morphemes with third person arguments renders the status of a third person argument as an Agreement-A or an Agreement-B more complex. The simplest way to define the status of third person arguments is in terms of the status that a first or second person argument bearing the same semantic relation to verb would have. For example, we can identify the status of *titqa'* 'man' in (9) by examining the corresponding clause (given in (10)) which has the same meaning as (9) except that the semantic rôle played by *titqa'* 'man' is played by a second person singular argument in (10). Since the second person marking in (10) is associated with Agreement-B's (agreement-objects), this means that *titqa'* 'man' in (9) is an Agreement-B (agreement-object) as well.

(9) hu wu-kat-i titqa'
1 see-INDIC man
'I saw the man [prox].'

(10) hu wu-kat-is-ni
1 see-2-INDIC
'I saw you (sg.).'

A further complication is that with third person arguments of the verb, there is a third possible status in addition to being an Agreement-A (agreement-subject) and an Agreement-B (agreement-object). I am using the term argument in this paper in a broad sense to refer to dependents for which the verb (rather than in the narrower sense to include any dependent of the verb subcategorizes). In (11), the noun *?a·kwukɬi?it-s* 'mountain-obv' (I will discuss the function of the obviative suffix below) is neither an Agreement-A nor an Agreement-B, in that there is no grammatical sentence in Kutenai that involves replacing this noun by a first or second person argument coded on the verb by morphemes diagnostic for Agreement-A's and Agreement-B's.

(11) hu qa-kiɬ ?iɬwa-ni kiɬq'aɬɬi ?a·kwukɬi?it-s
1,SUBJ there shoot-INDIC elk mountain-OBV
'I shot (and killed) an elk [prox] on the mountain [obv].'

Because this represents a third possible status for arguments of the verb, I will say that arguments with this property are Agreement-C's (agreement-nones). Intuitively, these are arguments of the verb that do not get coded on the verb in Kutenai. In (12) is listed the status of each of the three arguments in (11), represented by their English glosses.

(12) 1sg Agreement-A (agreement-subject)
elk Agreement-B (agreement-object)
mountain Agreement-C (agreement-none)

Note that, with the possible exception of a few unusual constructions whose syntax I do not understand, it is not possible in Kutenai for first or second person arguments to be Agreement-C's.

To summarize what we have accomplished so far, the pronominal clitics and suffixes in Kutenai divide the arguments of clauses into three classes, those associated with Agreement-A morphemes, those associated with Agreement-B morphemes, and those that are not associated with any pronominal clitics or suffixes.[2] Every argument in every clause has one of the three statuses defined in terms of these pronominal morphemes. A common approach to grammatical relations is in effect to identify a set of

grammatical rules that divide the arguments in clauses into some set of different classes. A common assumption is that these will converge to define the grammatical relations in the language, that these rules will serve as tests for the grammatical relations, where the grammatical relations are viewed as having a status independent from the particular rules that serve as tests for them. However, a large body of literature over the past twenty years has shown that things often do not work out that nicely, and a considerable body of theoretical work is devoted specifically to finding ways to deal with the instances where they do not work out so nicely (cf. Van Valin 1981, Perlmutter 1982). In particular, what one often finds is that to some extent the tests fail to converge, where the classification of arguments defined by one rule is in a sense inconsistent with the classification of arguments defined by some other rule. For example there is now considerable literature observing how morphological criteria often do not match up with syntactic criteria (e.g., Anderson 1976). One response to various mismatches has been to assume that grammatical relations are primarily a syntactic phenomenon, and thus to "reject" morphological evidence when it does not match up with syntactic evidence. This response is carried further when syntactic criteria fail to match, by defining certain syntactic criteria as "more criterial." Another response is to propose that with multiple levels of some sort the facts can be accounted for in terms of grammatical relations at different levels, or in terms of more complex notions defined in terms of different levels (e.g., those of "acting" subject and "working" subject in Relational Grammar, cf. Perlmutter 1982). Most such approaches, however, are based on the goal of developing a universal theory of grammatical relations, a universal metalanguage for describing different languages. Since I am not interested in pursuing such a goal, what suffices for my purpose is a weakened notion of grammatical relation that is tied to specific rules.[3] In this weakened sense, Agreement-A, Agreement-B, and Agreement-C in Kutenai really are grammatical relations. In so far as there is clustering for different grammatical rules, in other words in so far as different grammatical rules in a language define identical or consistent classifications for arguments within clauses, I assume that an explanatory theory will explain why there is the sort

of clustering we find. The standard notion of grammatical relation is viewed as explaining this clustering; in my view, it at best labels the clustering and at worst provides headaches when there is a lack of clustering.

The situation in Kutenai is not that there is a lack of clustering, but rather that there are a number of distinct *dimensions* of grammatical relations that interact in mutually constraining ways. On my view, describing the grammatical relations in Kutenai involves identifying and describing these different dimensions and identifying the ways in which they are mutually constraining. The Agreement dimension represents one of the more transparent of these dimensions.

THE OBVIATION DIMENSION

The second way in which arguments in a clause can be classified in Kutenai is in terms of the inflectional marking of these arguments themselves, particularly of nouns. The example in (13) contains two nouns that are inflected differently.

(13)   wu-kat-i   pałkiy-s   titqat'
       see-INDIC   woman-OBV   man
       'The man [prox] saw the woman [obv].'

The noun *pałkiy* 'woman' bears a suffix -s glossed 'obv', an abbreviation for *obviative*, while the noun *titqat'* 'man' is uninflected. The presence versus absence of this suffix defines a second classification of arguments of a clause, into two classes which can be called *Obviation-A* and *Obviation-B* (by analogy to the names *Agreement-A* and *Agreement-B*). Because of striking grammatical and pragmatic parallelism between these two classes and two classes in Algonquian languages (cf. Dryer 1992a for a detailed comparison), I will employ the terms used by Algonquianists, *proximate* and *obviative*, as nicknames for Obviation-A's and Obviation-B's respectively. Since the terms *proximate* and *obviative* do not come with the heavy connotational baggage that words like *subject* and *object* do, I generally use these nicknames, rather than the more official terms. This classification into proximate versus

obviative applies only to third person arguments. At most one argument per clause (and most commonly exactly one if the clause contains one or more third person arguments) can be proximate. All other third person arguments will be obviative. A crude initial characterization of the semantics of the distinction is that the proximate argument is typically the most "topical" element in the surrounding discourse (see Garvin 1958, Dryer 1994 for further discussion). Note that the distinction between proximate and obviative applies only to third person arguments; these notions simply do not apply to first and second person arguments.

There are severe grammatical constraints on the interaction of the Agreement and Obviation dimensions. In other words, theses two systems interact with each other. One important constraint is that given in (14).

(14)   In morphologically basic clauses, the proximate participant is always the highest third person participant on the following hierarchy:

Agreement-A > Agreement-B > Agreement-C

By morphologically basic clause, I mean ones without additional verbal morphology that explicitly signals different linkings of status on the Agreement dimension with semantic rôles. We will examine a number of instances of morphologically non-basic clauses below. The example in (13) above conforms to the constraint in (14) in that *titqat'* 'man', which can be shown to be the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) is proximate (as indicated by a lack of obviative morphology). Since there can be at most one proximate argument per clause, this requires that *pałkiy* 'woman' (which can be shown to be an Agreement-B (agreement-object)) be obviative (and its morphology shows that it is).

Note that the constraint in (14) has the effect that the obviation system, while in one sense linked to discourse function, also serves as the sole indication of which noun is the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) and which noun is the Agreement-B (agreement-object), i.e., who saw who. In morphologically basic clauses with two third person arguments, the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) will always be the argument that is proximate, and the Agreement-B (agreement-object) will always be the

argument that is obviative. This is the sole indication of who saw who. Thus we can reverse the order of the two nouns in (13), as in (15), without changing the meaning.

(15)   wu-kat-i   titqat'   pałkiy-s
see-INDIC   man   woman-OBV
'The man [prox] saw the woman [obv].'

While the obviative morphology on the Agreement-B (agreement-object) in (13) and (15) might seem to have a function analogous to object case marking, other examples show that this is not in general the case. In (16), for example, the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) is first person, so that the Agreement-B (agreement-object), *titqat'* 'man' is the highest third person argument in the hierarchy in (14), and thus is proximate. In this case, the proximate argument is an Agreement-B rather than an Agreement-A.

(16)   hu   wu-kat-i   titqat'
1   see-INDIC   man
'I saw the man [prox].'

The example in (17) illustrates a case in which both the Agreement-A and the Agreement-B are non-third person, so that it is the Agreement-C (agreement-none) *qapsin* 'something' that is proximate, since it is highest third person argument on the hierarchy in (14).

(17)   ?at   hin   qa-amat-ikᶜ-ap-kił-ni   qapsin
IMPERF   2   NEG-give-BEN-1-2PL-INDIC   something
'You people never give me anything [prox].' (tape NS.7, story 2, line 10)

We will come back to other interactions between the Agreement and Obviation dimensions below.

MORPHOLOGICALLY NON-BASIC CLAUSES

In the examples discussed so far, the positions on the Agreement dimension have appeared to be directly linked to semantic rôle: the Agreement-A

(agreement-subject) has been the *notional/logical/semantic subject*, the A, the *agent*, the *actor*, depending on one's terminology, while the Agreement-B (agreement-object) has been the *notional/logical/semantic object*, the P, the *patient*, the *theme*, the *goal*, or the *undergoer*, again depending on one's terminology. The examples in (18) illustrate the *it*-construction in Kutenai, in which this is not so.

(18) (a) hu wu·kat-iɬ-ni
    1   see-PASSIVE-INDIC
    'I was seen.'

    (b) wu·kat-iɬ-ni
    see-PASSIVE-INDIC
    'He/she/it was seen / They were seen.'

In both examples in (18) the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) bears the semantic relation to the verb that in a morphologically basic clause would be borne by the Agreement-B (agreement-object). Because this is characteristic of clauses in other languages that are often called *passive*, I will use this term as a nickname for *it*-clauses, deferring until later in the paper the question of to what extent this label is really appropriate. This general property of *it*-clauses is stated in (19).

(19) The Agreement-A of an *it*-clause ("passive" clause) bears the same semantic relation to the verb that Agreement-B's bear in morphologically basic clauses.

I should make clear that by "same semantic relation," I do not mean some generalized relation like patient, theme, or undergoer, but rather the specific semantic relation with the verb in question. Thus in (18), we can call the semantic relation, the "see-ee," the one that is seen (or perhaps more precisely the "*wu·kat-ee*," since the two verbs are not exactly the same semantically).

The existence of *it*-clauses illustrates that the mapping from semantic rôles to the Agreement dimension is not a direct mapping, since a given semantic rôle may be an Agreement-A (agreement-subject) in one clause but

an Agreement-B (agreement-object) in another clause. It is convenient, though not essential, to distinguish a third dimension, what I will call the Semantic-Rôle-Linked dimension, which maps directly onto the Agreement dimension for morphologically basic clauses, but not for morphologically non-basic clauses. This dimension has three values, Semantic-A (semantic-subject), Semantic-B (semantic-object) and Semantic C (semantic-neither, i.e., neither semantic-subject nor semantic-object). The values for this dimension are defined as in (20).

(20) An argument/noun phrase is
(a) a Semantic-x (where x is either A or B) in a clause if it bears the same semantic relation to the verb as an argument that is an Agreement-x in the corresponding morphologically basic clause (if there is one);

(b) a Semantic-C if there is no corresponding morphologically basic clause in which an argument/noun phrase bears its semantic relation to the verb.

Note that because the Semantic-Rôle-Linked dimension can be defined in terms of the Agreement dimension, it is actually non-essential: any reference to this dimension could be replaced by a more complex expression embodying something like that in (20). Nevertheless, for purposes of presentation, it is useful.

It follows from (20) that in morphologically basic clauses the Semantic-Rôle-Linked dimension and the Agreement dimension will be directly linked, as in (21).

(21) (a) the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) is the Semantic-A (semantic-subject)

(b) the Agreement-B (agreement-object) is the Semantic-B (semantic-object)

(c) the Agreement-C (agreement-none) is the Semantic-C (semantic-neither)

As a first approximation, we can state the linking in *it*-clauses ("passive" clauses) as in (22).[4]

(22) (a) the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) is a Semantic-B (semantic-object)
    (b) there cannot be an Agreement-B (agreement-object)
    (c) there cannot be a Semantic-A (semantic-subject)

There are a variety of other verbal suffixes in Kutenai that indicate deviations from the direct link between the Semantic-Rôle-Linked dimension and the Agreement dimension. One of these, the suffix -*aps*, the inverse suffix, I discuss below. Here I briefly discuss one of a number of other such suffixes, the benefactive suffix -*ik¢*, illustrated in (23).

(23) wa‡kn-ik¢-ap-ni   k̓ik‡i-s   misa‡
    bring-BEN-1-INDIC   food-OBV   Mike
    'Mike [prox] brought me food [obv].'

The status of the three arguments in (23) in the two dimensions under discussion is given in (24).

(24) Mike   Agreement-A (agreement-subject)
              Semantic-A (semantic-subject)
    me   Agreement-B (agreement-object)
              Semantic-C (semantic-neither)
    food   Agreement-C (agreement-none)
              Semantic-B (semantic-object)

In other words, the effect of the benefactive suffix is that the first person singular argument in (23) is an Agreement-B (agreement-object) but a Semantic-C (more specifically a benefactive), while the noun *k̓ik‡is* 'food', the Semantic-B (semantic-object), is an Agreement-C (agreement-none). Thus the general characterization of *ik¢*-clauses is that given in (25).

(25) In *ik¢*-clauses,
    (a) the Agreement-B (agreement-object) is a Semantic-C (more specifically, benefactive)

    (b) the Semantic-B (semantic-object) is an Agreement-C (agreement-none)

Note that there is no way to express the meaning of (23) without employing the benefactive form of the verb. In general, if a human argument in a Kutenai clause is a Semantic-C (neither a semantic-subject nor a semantic-object), it must be an Agreement-B (agreement-object). Kutenai has a number of other suffixes like the benefactive suffix that I will not discuss here that are necessary in such cases.

THE INVERSE CONSTRUCTION

Much of what we have seen so far in Kutenai, except for the proximate-obviative distinction, is commonplace among the languages of the world. It is what I will call the inverse construction that makes the entire question of grammatical relations in Kutenai less straightforward. The two sentences in (26) represent two ways to express the same basic meaning (excluding the pragmatic effect of the proximate-obviative contrast).

(26) (a) wu-kat-i   pa‡kiy   titqat'-s
        see-INDIC   woman   man-OBV
        'The woman [prox] saw the man [obv].'
    (b) wu-kat-aps-i   pa‡kiy-s   titqat'
        see-INVERSE-INDIC   woman-OBV   man
        'The woman [obv] saw the man [prox].'

The two sentences in (26) differ in form in three ways, summarized in (27).

(27) (a) the verb in (26b) bears a suffix -*aps*, labelled here as "inverse," while the verb in (26a) is morphologically basic;
    (b) the Semantic-A (semantic-subject) *pa‡kiy* 'woman' is proximate in (26a), but obviative in (26b);

(c) the Semantic-B (semantic-object) *titqat* 'man' is obviative in (26a), but proximate in (26b).

I will refer to morphologically basic clauses like (26a) as *direct* clauses and to clauses like (26b) in which the suffix *-aps occurs as inverse* clauses (again on analogy to the grammatically and pragmatically similar construction in Algonquian languages, except that in Kuenai it is only used when both arguments are third person).

The general relationship between the Semantic-Rôle-Linked dimension and the Obviation dimension for transitive clauses (though we will have to modify this below) is expressed in (28).

(28) (a) Direct clause
    Proximate = Semantic-A (semantic-subject)
    Obviative = Semantic-B (semantic-object)

    (b) Inverse clause
    Proximate = Semantic-B (semantic-object)
    Obviative = Semantic-A (semantic-subject)

One way to view the choice between the two sentences in (26) is in terms of which argument is proximate. In some sense, the choice of proposition to be expressed (that the woman saw the man), and thus what is Semantic-A (semantic-subject) and Semantic-B (semantic-object), is determined by what content the speaker wants to say, while the choice of what is proximate and what is obviative is determined by the discourse context (and to some extent, perhaps, by how the speaker wants to convey the basic content). In the case of (26), for example, the situation will determine that the proposition the speaker wishes to express is the proposition that the woman saw the man. If the discourse factors determining which argument is proximate determine that *paɬkiy* 'woman' is proximate, then this means that the direct construction in (26a) will be used. If, on the other hand, the discourse factors determining which argument is proximate determine that *titqat* 'man' is proximate, then the inverse construction in (26b) will be used. The example in (29) gives

two consecutive sentences from a text that illustrate a situation in which the inverse construction is essentially obligatory.

(29) (a) qaki?-ni   " ... "
    say-INDIC
    'He [prox] [i.e., Chickadee] said " ... " '

    (b) n-uɬpaɬ-naps-i   ka-kin-s ɸ
    PRED-hear-INVERSE-INDIC   wolf-OBV-and
    'Wolf [obv] heard him [i.e., Chickadee] [prox] and ...'
    (tape 20, second part, lines 40, 45)

In (29b), the Semantic-B (semantic-object) is a pronominal reference to a character called Chickadee, which was the proximate in the immediately preceding sentence. The Semantic-A (semantic-subject) in (29b) is a reference to the character Wolf, which was not mentioned in the preceding section. In such situations, the participant that was proximate in the immediately preceding sentence almost always continues as proximate in the second sentence.

INVERSE CLAUSES AND THE AGREEMENT DIMENSION

The evidence in the preceding section argues that for a given choice of clause type, direct or inverse, the linking between the Semantic-Rôle-Linked dimension and the Obviation dimension is fixed. We will see below that the situation is actually somewhat more complicated, but before the relevant data are examined, a question arises about the value of the arguments in inverse clauses with respect to the agreement dimension. In (30) are listed three hypotheses about the answer to this question.

(30) (a) Hypothesis 1:   The Semantic-A in an inverse clause is the
    Agreement-A

    (b) Hypothesis 2:   The Semantic-B in an inverse clause is the
    Agreement-A

(c) Hypothesis 3: The status of the two arguments in an inverse clause with respect to the Agreement dimension is indeterminate.

Hypothesis 1 says in effect that inverse clauses do not differ from direct clauses in terms of the status of arguments on the Agreement dimension, implying that they differ only with respect to the Obviation dimension. Hypothesis 2 says that inverse clauses also differ from direct clauses in terms of the Agreement dimension, that inverse clauses resemble *it*-clauses ("passive" clauses) to the extent that the Agreement-A is a Semantic-B. Hypothesis 3 says that the language provides no basis for deciding between Hypotheses 1 and 2 and that the correct analysis is one that leaves the question unanswered. Hypotheses like Hypothesis 3 are often ruled out *a priori*. In such cases linguists often say that there is no way to decide between Hypotheses 1 and 2, but that one of them is true, that we just do not know which is true. In contrast, Hypothesis 3 says that both Hypotheses 1 and 2 are false, that the correct analysis is one that leaves it unspecified. In other words, by Hypothesis 3, the indeterminacy is not a matter of ignorance on our part but the correct solution.

The discussion so far might seem to imply that Hypothesis 3 must be the correct one. According to what has been said so far, because of the absence of overt third person marking, the only way to determine the status of a third person argument is by examining the corresponding clause with the third person argument replaced by a first or second person argument. However, since inverse constructions only involve clauses with two third person arguments, there are no corresponding clauses with first or second person arguments, so it might appear that there is no way to determine a status on the Agreement dimension for the arguments in inverse clauses. However, it turns out that there is one situation in which third person pronominal marking occurs on the verb. Namely, while there is no overt pronominal marking for proximate arguments, there is pronominal marking for obviative arguments. This arises, for example, with nouns that are possessed by a third person nominal, as in (31).

(31) qa·ɬ ʔakmuxu-s waɬunak-ʔis niʔ watak
PTCL fall.out-OBV tongue-3.POSS the frog
'The Frog's [prox] tongue [obv] would come out.'
(tape 126, side B, line 125)

In (31), the sole argument of the verb *ʔakmuxu* 'fall out' is *waɬunak-ʔis niʔ watak* 'the frog's tongue', in which the possessed noun *waɬunak* 'tongue' is the head noun and *niʔwatak* 'the frog' is the possessor. The possessed noun *waɬunak* 'tongue' bears a suffix *-ʔis*, indicating that it is possessed by a third person possessor. The situation is made more complicated by the fact that the possessed noun is not inflected as obviative.[5] However, it triggers obviative agreement on the verb, if it is the Agreement-A of that verb. The example in (32) is similar to (31), except that here there is no separate possessor noun, just the possessor marking on the possessed noun. But again, since the noun is possessed, we get an obviative agreement suffix on the verb.

(32) wu-kat-ap-is-ni ma-ʔis
see-1SG.OBJ-OBV-INDIC mother-3.POSS
'His [prox] mother [obv] saw me.'

Obviative marking on the verb also occurs if all of the arguments in a clause are obviative. This occurs in texts in situations where the proximate participant in the surrounding text does not get mentioned in a particular sentence in which the only mentions are of lesser participants. The sentence in (33) is an example from a text in which the proximate participant in the preceding text is a man who has just lain down on the ground to sleep and is concerned about being disturbed by wolves.

(33) ɬaxa-s-i niʔ-s ka·kin-s
arrive-OBV-INDIC the-OBV wolf-OBV
'The wolves got there.' (tape NS.21, story 18, line 61)

Here, the sole argument is inflected as obviative and triggers obviative agreement on the verb. There are also instances in which the obviative marking on the verb is the only indication of an argument of the verb. For

example the clause immediately following the sentence in (33) in its text is the clause given in (34).

(34) k-¢xakił   ʔiqanaxunak-is
 SUBORD-begin   all.lie.down-OBV
 'They all started lying down.'   (tape NS.21, story 18, line 62)

Here, the sole indication of the argument of the verb is the obviative suffix on the verb. When the obviative suffix is the sole marking on the verb, it is interpreted as referring to something that was obviative in the preceding text, usually the immediately preceding sentence. In the context immediately following (33), (34) is unambiguously referring to the wolves.

While the examples above illustrate that the verb can inflect for the obviative status of an argument, the question arises what characterizes obviative arguments that cause such inflections on verbs. Is the class of arguments which trigger obviative marking on verbs characterizable in terms of their status on the Agreement dimension? It is easy to show, in fact, that the class of arguments triggering obviative marking on verbs (when they are obviative) is exactly the class of Agreement-A's (agreement-subjects). This can be shown by the defining characteristic of third person Agreement-A's: a third person nominal is an Agreement-A if a corresponding clause with a first or second person argument involves proclitics and possibly suffixes that are associated with Agreement-A's. For example, if we take the example above in (32), and replace the obviative argument by a second person singular argument, the form we get is that given in (35), with the second person proclitic *hin* that is associated only with Agreement-A's.

(35) hin   wu-kat-ap-ni
 2   see-1SG-INDIC
 'You saw me.'

The fact that obviative marking does not occur on verbs for obviative Agreement-B's (agreement-objects) and Agreement-C's (agreement-nones) is illustrated by various examples above in which either an Agreement-B or an Agreement-C was obviative, but without obviative marking on the verb.

The fact that obviative marking on verbs is diagnostic for Agreement-A's means that we now have a further way to determine the status on the Agreement dimension of proximate third person arguments: we not only can try replacing the third person argument by a first of second person argument, but we can also try replacing it by a corresponding obviative argument. (This is particularly useful for verbs whose meaning does not fit well with a human argument.) For example, we can take (26a) above, repeated here as (36a), and replace the proximate argument *pałkiy* 'woman' by the corresponding obviative form, and we find obviative marking appearing on the verb, as shown in (36b).

(36) (a) wu-kat-i   pałkiy   titqat'-s
 see-INDIC   woman   man-OBV
 'The woman [prox] saw the man [obv].'

 (b) wu-kat-s-i   pałkiy-s   titqat'-s
 see-OBV-INDIC   woman-OBV   man-OBV
 'The woman [obv] saw the man [obv].'

Clauses like (36b) are actually quite rare in texts, namely clauses with two overt obviative arguments, one the Agreement-A (agreement-subject), the other the Agreement-B (agreement-object). More common are examples like (37), in which the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) is expressed solely by the obviative marking on the verb, and the Agreement-B (agreement-object) is expressed by an overt noun phrase; (37a) corresponds to (36b) while (37b) is an actual text example.

(37) (a) wu-kat-s-i   titqat'-s
 see-OBV-INDIC   man-OBV
 'He/she [obv] saw a man [obv].'

 (b) taxa-s   ń̓upxa-s-i   ni?-s   wan̓mu-s
 then-OBV   see-OBV-INDIC   the-OBV   blood-OBV
 'Then they [obv] saw the blood [obv].'
 (tape 146, story 1, line 177)

The Agreement-A (agreement-subject) in (37b) is a reference to some dogs which are mentioned in the preceding sentence but which are distinct from the primary character in the surrounding text.

Obviative marking can also occur in *ił*-clauses ("passive" clauses). As we might expect from other instances of the pronominal marking associated with Agreement-A's (agreement-subjects), an obviative Semantic-B (semantic-object) triggers obviative marking on "passive" verbs, as in (38).

(38) wu-kat-ił-is-ni
      see-PASSIVE-OBV-INDIC
      'He/she/it [obv] was seen.'

Crucially, obviative marking is also possible in inverse clauses, as in (39).

(39) ma-?is   misáł wu-kat-aps-is-ni   małi-s
      mother-3.POSS Mike see-INVERSE-OBV-INDIC Mary-OBV
      'Mary [obv] saw Mike's [prox] mother [obv].'

The status of each of the three nominals in (39) is given in (40), leaving the status on the Agreement dimension unresolved for the moment.

(40)

Mary	Semantic-A	Obviative	Agreement-?
Mike	NA	Proximate	NA
Mike's mother	Semantic-B	Obviative	Agreement-?

Since *misáł* 'Mike' is simply a possessor of an argument of the verb, it is not itself an argument of the verb, so it does not have a status on the Semantic-Rôle-Linked dimension or the Agreement dimension. But it is still the proximate participant in the clause, forcing both arguments of the verb to be obviative. It is easy to determine that *małi* 'Mary' is Semantic-A (semantic-subject) while *ma?is misáł* 'Mike's mother' is Semantic-B (semantic-object). But the status of these arguments on the Agreement dimension might not be immediately obvious: since both arguments are obviative, which one is triggering the obviative agreement?

The situation is simpler if we examine the examples in (41) and (42).

(41) wu-kat-aps-is-ni   pałkiy-s
      see-INVERSE-OBV-INDIC woman-OBV
      'A woman [obv] saw him/her [obv].'

(42) wu-kat-aps-i   pałkiy-s
      see-INVERSE-INDIC   woman-OBV
      'A woman [obv] saw him/her [prox].'

These two examples differ in that both arguments are obviative in (41) while only the Agreement-A (agreement subject) is obviative in (42). They also differ in that the verb bears obviative agreement in (41) but not in (42). The obviative agreement in (41) does not seem to be with the Semantic-A (semantic-subject) *pałkiy* 'woman', since this noun is obviative in both clauses but obviative agreement shows up only in (41). On the other hand, the presence of obviative agreement on the verb in (41) and (42) does vary with the status of the Semantic-B (semantic-object), which is pronominal here, being expressed by the absence of any morpheme in (42) and, apparently, by the obviative agreement in (41). In other words, since there is obviative agreement on the verb in (41) and (42) if and only if the Semantic-B (semantic-object) is obviative, we must conclude that it is the Semantic-B (semantic-object) rather than the Semantic-A (semantic-subject) that triggers obviative agreement on the verb.

However, we have already established that in all other types of clauses, obviative agreement indicates that the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) is obviative. It thus follows that the Semantic-B (semantic-object) is the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) in inverse clauses. We have now determined which of the three hypotheses in (30) above is correct: it is Hypothesis 2, restated in (43).

(43) Hypothesis 2:   The Semantic-B in an inverse clause is the
                       Agreement-A.

Thus, inverse clauses resemble *ił*-clauses ("passive" clauses) to the extent that in both types of clauses, the Semantic-B (semantic-object) is the Agreement-A (agreement-subject).

One question that remains is what the status on the Agreement dimension is of the Semantic-A in inverse clauses, such as the noun *paɫkiy* 'woman' in (41) and (42). We have seen that it cannot be the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) since the verb bears obviative agreement only in (41) while the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) is obviative in both clauses. The two most obvious possibilities are that it is an Agreement-B (agreement-object) or an Agreement-C. A third possibility is that it is simply indeterminate between these two solutions. I am not aware of any strong arguments one way or the other, though I will consider below one possible argument that it is an Agreement-B (agreement-object).

In (44) to (47) are given a summary of what we have concluded about the status of the two arguments in direct and inverse clauses on each of the three dimensions we have discussed.

(44) Direct clause, one obviative

(a) wu·kat-i   paɫkiy   titqaʔ-s
    see-INDIC   woman   man-OBV
    'The woman [prox] saw the man [obv].'

(b) woman   Semantic-A   Proximate   Agreement-A
    man   Semantic-B   Obviative   Agreement-B

(45) Direct clause, two obviatives

(a) wu·kat-s-i   paɫkiy-s   titqaʔ-s
    see-OBV-INDIC woman-OBV   man-OBV
    'The woman [obv] saw the man [obv].'

(b) woman   Semantic-A   Obviative   Agreement-A
    man   Semantic-B   Obviative   Agreement-B

(46) Inverse clause, one obviative

(a) wu·kat-aps-i   paɫkiy-s
    see-INVERSE-INDIC woman-OBV
    'A woman [obv] saw him/her [prox].'

(b) woman   Semantic-A   Obviative   Agreement-B/C
    him/her   Semantic-B   Proximate   Agreement-A

(47) Inverse clause, two obviatives

(a) wu·kat-aps-is-ni   paɫkiy-s
    see-INVERSE-OBV-INDIC woman-OBV
    'A woman [obv] saw him/her [obv].'

(b) woman   Semantic-A   Obviative   Agreement-B/C
    him/her   Semantic-B   Obviative   Agreement-A

"SUBJECTS" IN KUTENAI

The discussion in the preceding sections describes, I claim, the grammatical relations in Kutenai, and is incomplete only in so far as it does not discuss other rules that may distinguish one class of arguments of the verb from other arguments. At this point, I am not aware of any such rules, though there probably are some that I have not discovered. I will return to this point below. It is worth asking how further data might be incorporated into the analysis developed so far, and how this might bear on questions of what, if anything, in Kutenai, should be called subjects. Let us first suppose that there are no additional rules in Kutenai relevant to grammatical relations, examine the implications of that to the question of grammatical relations in the language, and after that, turn to the possible implications of further conceivable data.

I stated at the beginning that one of the main points of this paper is to argue that there are (1) language-particular grammatical relations, (2) similarities among grammatical relations across different languages, and (3) functional and/or cognitive explanations for these similarities, but that there is not in addition to these three things something that is widely assumed to exist, namely some theoretically useful notion of cross-linguistic grammatical relations. I have described in some detail what I claim to be the language-particular grammatical relations in Kutenai. The phenomena I have described

can be described in a wide variety of so-called linguistic theories (an expression I find misleading because on my view different so-called linguistic "theories" are in general simply different metalanguages for describing linguistic facts), and it is not clear that descriptions in these different so-called theories differ in being true or not, any more than the truth of the claims of this paper ought not to be significantly affected if I had written it in French rather than English. However, a widely-held view is that the choice of theory / metalanguage will affect the degree to which the description succeeds in capturing similarities between the language and other languages, and that in so far as the description succeeds in capturing these similarities, the theory in which the description is couched explains these similarities. On this view, one's choice of terminology, employing terms like *subject*, *object*, *passive*, etc., or some other set of vocabulary, plays a crucial rôle in both describing the similarities and in explaining them. I will argue against this view below.

Let us ask what similarities do exist between the grammatical relations I have described for Kutenai and grammatical relations in other languages. First, the distinctions made in what I have called the Semantic-Rôle-Linked dimension bear a striking resemblance to distinctions made by other languages. Since in this case Kutenai does strongly resemble other languages, the use of cross-linguistic terminology might be relatively harmless. In fact, languages in general show such remarkable similarity in this respect that linguists take these similarities so much for granted that they are often overlooked. While some languages do exhibit deviations from this pattern, the fact that the murderer in events of murdering, the hitter in events of hitting, the hearer in events of hearing, and the believer in events of believing are all treated in the same way in so many languages leads many people to employ terms like *agent* for them and *patient* for the other argument with verbs in different languages with similar meanings, and to assume that there is some semantic rôle shared by all of them. Such terminology only obscures the non-triviality of the task of explaining these similarities. Only in the case of murderers in the above list need the so-called agent be a volitional instigator of an event. And the hitter, the hearer,

and the believer are all affected by the events in question and thus satisfy in some loose sense what is supposed to characterize patients or themes. (Cf. Jackendoff 1972:43-44 for arguments that hitters are themes.) This is not to say that there are not good reasons for treating murderers, hitters, hearers, and believers in the same way, but just that labeling them all *agents* without further comment does not explain the similarities, and only obscures the fact that there is something that needs to be explained. Furthermore, while the semantics can lead one to predict in most cases whether an argument of a verb will be a Semantic-A (semantic-subject), a Semantic-B (semantic-object), or a Semantic-C (semantic-neither) in Kutenai, there are some cases where it is less than obvious. It must be borne in mind that whether something is a Semantic-A or a Semantic-B or a Semantic-C is defined, not in terms of semantics, but in terms of the grammar of Kutenai, in terms of the agreement morphology that occurs with morphologically basic verbs. For example, without knowing about the grammar of Kutenai, it is not immediately obvious whether the indirect quotation in (48) is a Semantic-B (semantic-object) or a Semantic-C (neither a semantic-subject nor a semantic object).

(48) qaky-am-ni   piⱪ'ak   k-uɬ
      say-INDEF.SUBJ-INDIC   long.ago   SUBORD-finish
      ɬa   ɬuʔ-nam
      again   not.exist-INDEF.SUBJ
      'They say a long time ago there were no people left.'
      (more literally, 'They say a long time ago that people did not
      exist again') (tape NS.21, story 1, line 2)

However, the indefinite subject suffix -*am* on the main verb *qakyamni* 'say' can only occur on intransitive verbs, on verbs that cannot occur with a Semantic-B (semantic-object), so the subordinate clause here is a Semantic-C (neither a semantic-subject nor a semantic-object), rather than a Semantic-B. While Kutenai strongly resembles other languages in its Semantic-Rôle-Linked dimension, few languages exhibit anything much like its Obviation similarities. As discussed in Dryer (1992a), the similarity to Algonquian

languages is very striking, but the constructions in other languages that are often described as being like Algonquian turn out to be strikingly different when examined carefully. In this case, the Kutenai categories are clearly not instances of any common cross-linguistic category, and the choice of terminology traditionally associated with Algonquian is only done out of convenience. Few people would say that employing the same terminology as that used for the Algonquian categories captures or explains the similarity. In fact, the similarity is so striking that the explanation must be historical; I argue in Dryer (1992a) that it is most likely due to contact. The similarity is thus fundamentally different from the similarity between the Semantic-Rôle-Linked dimension in Kutenai and similar distinctions made in other languages, where the explanation for the similarity is assumed not to be historical.

It is with the Agreement dimension that the situation is least clear, where there are both significant similarities and significant differences between Kutenai and constructions in other languages. In addition, the Agreement-A is the only grammatical relation in Kutenai that anybody is likely to be tempted to employ the term *subject* for. There are many reasons why we would not want to use the term *subject* for proximate arguments in Kutenai, among them the fact that the proximate may be an Agreement-A, an Agreement-B or an Agreement-C, depending on whether there are first or second person arguments. In addition, while subjects are largely defined in terms of individual clauses, the domain of proximates goes, not only beyond the clause, but also beyond the sentence, in that sentences without a proximate are very common, both ones in which all arguments are first or second person, and ones in which all arguments are obviative. The motivation for employing the term *subject* across different languages is supposedly to capture the similarities among languages, but Kutenai is not similar to most other languages in this respect.

There might be some temptation to use the term *subject* for Semantic-A's (semantic-subjects), since for morphologically basic clauses the Semantic-A resembles what are subjects in many languages. However, the fact that the Agreement-A (agreement-subject) is the Semantic-B (semantic-object) in *it*-

clauses ("passive" clauses) would generally be considered good reason not to call the Semantic-A (semantic-subject) *subject*. The fact that the Semantic-B (semantic-object) is represented by a proclitic that otherwise marks a first person Semantic-A (semantic-subject) in such clauses is precisely the sort of fact that motivates a notion of subject in many languages, since the grammatical category is clearly not directly linked to semantic rôles.

(49)   hu   wu·kat-iɬ-ni
       1   see-PASSIVE-INDIC
       'I was seen.'

Constructions similar to the one in (49) are very common cross-linguistically, and the choice of the term *passive* for such clauses in other languages is based precisely on the fact that an argument that has the semantic properties of non-subject in morphologically basic clauses in such languages is treated grammatically like the subject in morphologically basic clauses. In this respect, Kutenai is quite similar to other languages, and describing (49) as a clause in which the subject has the semantic properties of what would be an object in a corresponding morphologically simple clause would describe (49) in a way that would also fit similar clauses in other languages. The nickname *passive* thus appears to be an appropriate and uncontroversial label for the *it*-construction. If it were only clauses like (49) that we needed to worry about, there would be little reason not to use the term *subject* to refer to Agreement-A's.

It is with inverse clauses that Agreement-A's exhibit properties that make them somewhat different from what are generally called subjects in other languages. Whether or not we use the term *subject* for Agreement-A's, the facts discussed above clearly show that the Semantic-B (semantic-object) in an inverse clause is the Agreement-A (agreement-subject). If we do use the term *subject* for Agreement-A's (agreement-subjects), this apparently leads to things that would make many linguists uncomfortable. In particular, if we use the term *subject* for Agreement-A's, it would be natural to use the term *object* for Agreement-B's (agreement-objects). Inverse clauses then have the property that their subject is semantically something that would be an object

in a corresponding morphologically simple clause. But since that is what characterizes passive constructions in other languages, this might suggest that the inverse construction is a kind of passive. But there are in fact a number of ways in which inverse constructions differ from what are called passive clauses in other languages. First of all, passive clauses in most languages have the property that they obligatorily or at least most commonly occur without what corresponds to the Semantic-A (semantic-subject), and if what corresponds to the Semantic-A does occur, it typically has grammatical properties similar to those of what correspond to Semantic-C's (neither semantic-subject not semantic-object). In English, for example, the so-called agentless passive is much more common (cf. Givón 1979:30) and when the so-called agent does occur, it has properties associated with elements that are not semantically arguments of the verb (in the narrow sense of the term), such as occurring with a preposition *by* and occurring in syntactic positions associated with prepositional phrase dependents of the verb but not the subject or object.

But in Kutenai, there are reasons for saying that the Semantic-A (semantic-subject) in an inverse clause is in fact obligatory. Because third person arguments in Kutenai are generally represented by the absence of morphemes that would indicate something other than a third person argument, this is not immediately obvious. In (50), for example, there is no overt morpheme or constituent representing the Semantic-A (semantic-subject).

(50) qak-ɬ-aps-i "..."
      say-TRANS-INVERSE-INDIC
      'He/she [obv] said to him/her [prox] "..."'

Clauses of the form of (50) are very common in texts: the inverse morphology on the verb makes it clear that the one doing the saying is some individual that was obviative in the immediately preceding text and that the one addressed is the individual that was proximate in the preceding text. Now while there is no overt morpheme representing the one doing the speaking in (50), thus causing some superficial similarity to English clauses

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like (51), there is a crucial difference between the interpretation of (50) and the interpretation of (51).

(51) He was told "..."

In particular, (51) is interpreted without it being clear who did the telling. While it may be inferable in context who did the telling, the one who did the telling is simply unspecified, as far as the grammar of English is concerned. In the Kutenai inverse sentence in (50), however, the one who did the telling must be clear in the context. In other words, (50) involves some sort of "zero anaphora," where the hearer can infer from the absence of an overt expression who is being referred to. This is, in fact, a property that in most languages is associated only with syntactic arguments of the verb, with subjects and objects, and in Kutenai, outside of the inverse construction, it is associated primarily with Agreement-A's (agreement-subjects) and Agreement-B's (agreement-objects). Another way to put it is to say that while passive clauses in other languages are intransitive (or involve at least a decrease in the syntactic valence of the verb), inverse clauses in Kutenai give no evidence of being intransitive. There are no facts that I am aware of in Kutenai that might lead one to say that direct clauses are transitive while inverse clauses are intransitive. And since transitive clauses in Kutenai otherwise always involve an Agreement-B (agreement-object), this would imply that the Semantic-A (semantic-subject) in an inverse clause is an Agreement-B (agreement-object). What that would say is that inverse clauses in Kutenai involve a reversal of subject and object. Precisely such a claim has been made for the inverse construction in Ojibwa, an Algonquian language, by Perlmutter & Rhodes (1988).

We now find ourselves in a somewhat paradoxical position. What started as an analysis supposedly motivated by the similarities between Agreement-A's (agreement-subjects) in Kutenai and what have been called subjects in other languages leads to positing an analysis of the Kutenai inverse which not only is apparently unmotivated for any other non-Algonquian language but also violates syntactic principles in a variety of theories. But there is a very simple reason why that happened. Agreement-A's in Kutenai are like

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subjects in other languages in some respects, but unlike subjects in other languages in other respects. And they are unlike subjects in other languages because they occur in inverse clauses, and inverse clauses are unlike constructions found in most other languages. Now we could take the position that Agreement-A's (agreement-subjects) are indeed subjects and that subjects in Kutenai differ from subjects in other languages in so far as they occur in a construction with cross-linguistically unusual properties. But there is something a bit hypocritical about such a position: if the reason for calling them subjects in the first place was to capture their similarity to subjects in other languages, then are we justified in then turning around and describing Kutenai subjects as unusual because they have properties unlike subjects in other languages?

The whole problem here is, I claim, simply an artifact of the notion of cross-linguistic grammatical relations, an artifact of assuming that it makes sense to ask whether Agreement-A's in Kutenai are subjects or not. We can certainly describe Kutenai adequately without worrying about whether they are subjects or not; we can do that just calling them *Agreement-A's*. And we can also characterize how Kutenai is similar to and different from other languages; we can do that simply by describing how Agreement-A's in Kutenai are similar to what have been called subjects in other languages and how they are at the same time somewhat different. And we can do that whether or not we call them subjects. Whenever we employ distinct terms for phenomena in a language, we run the risk of obscuring the similarities with other languages. And whenever we employ familiar terms, we run the risk of obscuring differences. But all that means is that every choice of terminology is somewhat convenient and somewhat inconvenient. One's choice of terminology affects which properties of the language one is describing are highlighted, those that make the language look similar to other languages and those that make it look different.

Now compare this with the view that there is a theoretical cross-linguistic notion of subject, and that we are faced with the problem of deciding whether or not Agreement-A's in Kutenai are subjects or not. On this view, it is either true or false that Agreement-A's in Kutenai are subjects, and that if we

have trouble deciding it must be because we do not know enough facts or perhaps that some of us are not reasoning properly. On my view, however, the question is not a matter of truth and falsity but at best a matter of taste: does one want to highlight the similarities or does one not want to highlight the differences. Arguing whether or not Agreement-A's in Kutenai are subjects is treating a terminological issue as if it were a substantive one. What is a true proposition is that Agreement-A's in Kutenai are like subjects in other languages in some respects but unlike them in other respects.

A move that some linguists are tempted to take at this point is to claim that languages like Kutenai demonstrate the non-categorical nature of concepts like *subject*. On this view, Agreement-A's in Kutenai are non-prototypical instances of subjects, or "sort of" subjects. The inverse construction in Kutenai is thus "sort of" a passive construction and "sort of" not. The Semantic-B in an inverse clause in Kutenai is "sort of" a subject and "sort of" not. And perhaps even, the subject in an inverse clause in Kutenai is partly the Semantic-B and partly the Semantic-A. Agreement-A's in Kutenai on this view bear a relation to the universal concept *subject* that is similar to the relationship of ostriches to birds.

I claim, however, that such an approach is simply confused. While the notion of prototype may be crucial in describing the semantics of natural language, our task here is not that of describing the semantics of a metalanguage for describing natural language. The fact that ostriches are non-prototypical birds may sound like a biological proposition, but it is really nothing more than the observation that ostriches deviate from the semantic prototype for birds, and that is a fact about the meaning of the word *bird*, not a fact about birds. Our task is to describe and explain linguistic phenomena, and to design a metalanguage in so far as that is useful in describing and explaining linguistic phenomena. Just as it is an empirical question what rôle if any folk-psychological notions play in psychology, it is an empirical question what rôle if any folk-linguistic notions like *subject* play in linguistics. I have already argued that they are not needed to describe individual languages, nor are they needed to describe similarities across languages. While it may be convenient to use the label *subject* for similar

grammatical relations in other languages, we can describe the similarities between Agreement-A's in Kutenai and such "subjects" without saying they are subjects or that they are not subjects or even that they are "sort of" subjects.

This leads to the third task, that of explaining the similarities. It is a popular view in linguistics that by employing the same terms for similar phenomena in different languages we capture or explain those similarities. Whether employing notions like *subject* for similar grammatical relations, even ignoring problematic cases like Kutenai, explains anything is itself largely a terminological issue. Some linguists are primarily interested in finding linguistic concepts that provide a mechanism for describing languages in ways that highlight the similarities, and designing theories employing such concepts that predict the linguistic phenomena we observe. But for those linguists who want to know *why* languages are similar to each other in the respects that they are, choosing labels accomplishes little beyond making it clear what needs to be explained. Why many languages have categories fitting the prototype of the folk notion *subject* and why more languages aren't more like Kutenai are challenging questions. I assume that there are functional and/or cognitive explanations for these facts, but this is not the place to pursue such questions.

Of course some linguists go beyond claiming that notions like *subject* (or related ones) are simply part of a language-internal explanatory theory, but claim that the concepts in the theory are innate properties of the human mind, and that the question of whether Agreement A's in Kutenai are subjects (or external arguments) is ultimately a question about what happens in the minds of Kutenai speakers when they learn and use their language. While such a view is coherent, such an approach apparently leaves no place for there being similarities among languages due to the functions that language serves or general cognitive properties, a view that I find wildly implausible and will not discuss further here.

There is, I believe, one useful observation to make about explaining the differences between Agreement A's in Kutenai and subjects in other

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languages, or more specifically about differences between the inverse construction in Kutenai and passive constructions in other languages. The primary reason for the existence of passive constructions in most languages appears to be that of providing a means for expressing propositions without mentioning the more agent-like participant. The primary function served by the Kutenai inverse construction is apparently fundamentally different. The primary function served by the Kutenai inverse construction, and the obviation system in general, appears to be that of reference tracking. The obviation system makes it possible to keep track of two participants in a text, without any overt morphemes referring to them. The inverse construction makes it possible to express propositions in which the rôles of the two participants have been reversed (relative to the Semantic-Rôle-Linked dimension), without a need for any pronominal or nominal morphemes. In this respect, the inverse construction is part of a system whose function is much more similar to switch-reference systems and gender distinctions with pronouns, even though those systems have completely different grammatical properties from the obviation system in Kutenai.

CONCLUSION

I have illustrated in this paper what it means to describe the grammatical relations in a language without worrying about how to employ cross-linguistic terms like *subject* and *object*. While such terms are convenient labels for similar categories of relations across languages, I have argued that that is all they are, and that there has been a tendency to over-reify them. I have argued that all that exists are language-particular grammatical relations, similarities among these language-particular grammatical relations across different languages, and functional, semantic and cognitive explanations for these similarities. If one believes that one can explain cross-linguistic similarities in such extra-linguistic terms, then cross-linguistic notions like *subject* and *object* become theoretically superfluous.

The tendency to employ cross-linguistic terminology is associated with linguistic typology, which examines the similarities and differences among

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languages. The view of looking at each language in its own terms is sometimes viewed as antithetical to typology. The views of this paper might seem odd coming from someone who works actively in linguistic typology (cf. Dryer 1986, 1992b). But one of the dangers of concentrating on the similarities among languages, on so-called universals, is that if one describes languages in terms of cross-linguistic terminology that "captures" the similarities, one may actually end up obscuring real differences among languages. The ways in which languages differ from one another are as much an object of interest as the ways in which they are similar. Furthermore, if one takes cross-linguistic terminology too seriously, there is a danger of circularity: the use of cross-linguistic terminology presupposes similarity, but we need to be able to examine the facts independently of that terminology in order to establish the similarities. Universal generalizations that are based on descriptions that "come out of the language," rather than out of some predetermined set of concepts, are more significant, since they mean that even if we describe languages in their own terms we can still find many ways in which they are similar.

NOTES

1   I will employ the commonly used name *Kutenai* throughout this paper. The name used by Kutenai people in Canada for their language is *Ktunaxa*. The research for this paper was supported by Research Grant 410-88-0267 from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by U.S. National Science Foundation Grant 9120438. I am indebted to Elizabeth Gravelle, a native speaker of Kutenai, for transcribing and translating the texts from which examples are cited here, and to Lawrence Morgan both for discussion and for making various of his materials available to me. See Morgan (1991) for a detailed description of the phonology and morphology of Kutenai.

2   If one wanted to be more precise, we could say that these morphemes provide a classification for every pair consisting of a clause and an argument in that clause.

3   The notion of pivot of a rule discussed by Van Valin (1993:56) is similar in being tied to specific rules but differs first in being tied to syntactic rules only and secondly in being associated only with rules where a single element in a clause bears a special status. In effect, it is restricted to elements that behave in a subject-like manner, while the notion of grammatical relation as I am assuming it here is not so restricted.

4   Note that this is sufficient only for passive clauses in which the passive morphology is the only way in which the verb is not morphologically basic. I will not discuss the issue of how to modify (22) for clauses which deviate from morphologically basic clauses in some way other than being passive. This is a general problem that many formal theories have proposed solutions for.

5   Possessed nouns take obviative marking only when the possessor is also obviative. In other words, possessed nouns inflect, not for their own obviation status, but for the obviation status of the possessor.

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